



Political Violence and Family Legacy: Trauma Transmission in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

Shiwani Phougat¹, Dr Manisha Luthra²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Languages, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut-250005, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Languages, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut-250005, Uttar Pradesh, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: 22 Feb 2026; Received in revised form: 19 Mar 2026; Accepted: 23 Mar 2026; Available online: 26 Mar 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland* tells the story of how the murder of Udayan during the Naxalite uprising—the one act of political violence—pulled the family into the psychological trauma world that shook the generations and the places. The book states that the political upheaval emotional stuff does not stay with the historical moment but it moves through silence, emotional detachment, and broken family bonds. This article claims the trauma rooted in the homeland is the main factor behind immigrant identity even after the physical relocation. It uses trauma theory to support its argument, for example, Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is an experience that "returns belatedly" in new forms (4), and Marianne Hirsch's idea of "postmemory" like the heritage of the later generations (5). The argument shows that in Lahiri's work, personal loss is set against a broader public history. Relying on qualitative textual analysis and diaspora studies, the paper finds that Gauri's withdrawal, Subhash's overcompensation in parenting, and Bela's rebellious activism exemplify the emotional heritage passed down from one generation to another. The authors identify silence, exile, and emotional absence as the main instruments through which the trauma gets to be inherited. Results indicate that *The Lowland* serves as a literary reservoir of political memory, depicting the way violent incidents deeply ingrained in national history become recurrences in the diasporic family structures. By uncovering the mental side of the political break, Lahiri's novel, in effect, broadens our conception of how literature serves as a record, a medium, and a means of transmission for the collective trauma's legacy across the different times and spaces.



Keywords— Immigrant identity, intergenerational trauma, Jhumpa Lahiri, memory, Naxalite movement, psychological inheritance, *The Lowland*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Naxalite movement which appeared in West Bengal in the late 1960s was based on Marxist revolutionary ideology and demanded that the armed struggle be conducted against the Indian state. In fact, the historians have stated: "it led to one of the most violent confrontations between the postcolonial Indian state and its own youth" (Banerjee 17). Lahiri places *The Lowland* amid such a setting of the horrors of political violence: a world marked by constant surveillance, imprisonment, and public executions, where terror spreads from political violence into the family's private sphere. The death of Udayan—shot to death in front

of his wife's eyes—is the novel's main trauma, the loss that it associates with the uprising and which it keeps coming back to long after the revolution has finished.

Among other things, the name of Jhumpa Lahiri is often mentioned as one of the most important diasporic writers, whose works challenge the emotional conflict between homeland and migration over and over. Jigna Desai states that "Lahiri's fiction maps the psychic costs of displacement and suggests that silence and memory play a major role in the formation of the immigrant subject" (31). *The Lowland* raises this issue even further by depicting trauma related to political history as something that keeps haunting

immigrant families and thus has a profound impact on the people who have never seen its source.

The lens for this research question is trauma studies. The scholar Cathy Caruth declares that the nature of trauma is not the defining factor of the event itself but rather the scene of the trauma's return, "not fully grasped as it occurs" and therefore never fully left behind" (Caruth 4). Marianne Hirsch refers to this transmission mechanism as "postmemory," whereby the descendants have the memory of the previous generations "so deeply that they even seem to be their own memories" (Hirsch 5). These notions help to understand the case of Bela in *The Lowland* who, without the direct political death she never saw, is psychologically influenced by it.

Research Aim and Questions

The novel *The Lowland* is examined by this research through the lens of trauma theory and diaspora studies with the aim of uncovering how trauma that stems from the Naxalite movement is communicated through silence, emotional rupture, and memory handed down. It questions:

1. By which mechanisms of transmission-silence, withdrawal, surrogate parenting-are intergenerational traumas created in the novel?
2. In what way does immigration change but still not remove the psychological effects of political violence?

Hypothesis

Such trauma caused by political uprisings is not limited by the geographical areas and it is spread not only through stories but also through emotional voids, quiet, and changed relationships with the family across generations.

II. HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

Naxalite Movement Overview

The Naxalite movement was a violent uprising of peasants among other things inspired by Maoist ideology, against landlords and state forces, which began in 1967 in Naxalbari, West Bengal. Sumanta Banerjee explains how the movement started as "a revolt of the rural poor against centuries of feudal oppression" and soon it spread to the politically radicalized youth (Banerjee 6). Adopting the catchphrase "China's Chairman is Our Chairman," Naxalites demanded the regime change in India through guerrilla warfare. The government reaction was a hard crackdown on the movement, thousands of suspected sympathizers were rounded up and killed. As Banerjee states, "police violence became the primary instrument of containing the movement" (47). Thus, it was a peasant-led insurgency that later on became an urban revolutionary

phenomenon and eventually students, writers, and middle-class youth got inspired.

Violence and Surveillance in Bengal

Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s experienced what historian Nandini Sundar termed a "regime of extraordinary surveillance and extrajudicial killings" (Sundar 14). Suspects were young men who were arrested, tortured, or shot without any recourse to the law. The Naxalism movement's popularity among students was the signal of the postcolonial crisis of disillusionment. Dipesh Chakrabarty mentions that the youth in Bengal turned to radical politics as "the nation had failed to deliver the promised justice and equality" (Chakrabarty 112). Through the working-class and lower-middle-class lens, the movement escalated into an anxiety-filled time in which political allegiance was a life-or-death issue.

Integration into Lahiri's Narrative

Lahiri connects the political history of the period right into *The Lowland*. The narrative doesn't show Udayan's turn to Naxalite revolt as a mere personal choice but rather as a result of the ideological milieu that influenced not just him but the whole generation. His engagement embodies what Banerjee refers to when she cites the Naxalite appeal to "idealistic youth convinced of the need for violent restructuring" (Banerjee 122). The areas where Lahiri writes about the police raid and the execution of people at public places, align with what has been historically recorded. Udayan for instance gets shot in front of his family, the story being an echo of the real methods used to terrorize communities. With her characters, Lahiri doesn't just draw their personal stories but puts them in a politically accurate scenario which is a history of the nation's tragedy disguised in the form of the private one.

The psychological lens through which the novel is viewed does not overshadow the novel's political aspect. It shows how the violence inflicted by the state gradually takes over the most intimate spaces in the house. What Lahiri is aiming at in the sentence, "The house where he had grown up was now the place where he had been killed" (*The Lowland* 41) is the eradication of the difference between home and war zone. The falling of this wall is the source of the trauma which, being passed on from one generation to another, is, at times, beyond the understanding of the novel's characters.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Studies on Lahiri: Displacement, Identity, Memory

Scholarly and critical works about Jhumpa Lahiri have, by and large, concentrated on her treatment of the above themes, which are displacement, identity crisis, and

memory, in the framework of the South Asian diaspora. N. C. Mondal exhibits that Lahiri's narrative consistently features "displacement, fragmentation, isolation, rootlessness, discrimination, marginalization, and identity crisis" as the elements that not only define but also inevitable pervade characters' lives (Mondal 4). Similarly, an article on Lahiri's diasporic consciousness acknowledges that her writing represents "identity crisis, sense of displacement and alienation" as experiences common to both first and second-generation immigrants (Khan 76).

These and other critics emphasize the conflict of the recollection of the homeland with the new cultural milieu. One of their studies points out that Lahiri's characters are caught in "a permanent mental and emotional war between the myth and customs of the old world and freedom of the new one" (Halder 140). This observation is very important for *The Lowland* as well, where the past of Naxalite Bengal is not just a memory but cohabits and continues to shape life in the United States. Lahiri's writing, according to another critic, depicts "the struggles of navigating dual cultural landscapes" and the heavy emotional 'baggage' of belonging to more than one world at the same time (Qazi 1).

Most of these research works, however, emphasize cultural displacement and generational conflicts as their main themes, thereby somewhat neglecting the aspect of political violence in the homeland becoming a psychological legacy that crosses the boundaries of time and generations. The present article is an attempt to fill this gap in relation to *The Lowland*.

Trauma Theory and Postmemory

Trauma studies offer a necessary conceptual framework to comprehend Lahiri's portrayal of political violence and its continuation in the afterlife. Cathy Caruth is a significant reference point in this domain. According to Caruth, "traumatic experience, besides the suffering it entails even from the psychological dimension, involves a certain paradox: the most direct witnessing of a traumatic event may be recognized as an absolute failure to understand it; that very immediacy, paradoxically, may be that of a delayed recognition" (Caruth 92). If translated into narrative terms, it signifies that trauma is very often recounted indirectly, through nightmares, repetitions, silences, and fragments of memory. In *The Lowland*, Gauri's silence surrounding Udayan's death and her prolonged emotional withdrawal can be counted among such instances of belatedness.

The idea of postmemory, as proposed by Marianne Hirsch, is a point of departure that helps in understanding Bela's role as a second-generation individual. In one of her most influential works, Hirsch states that "postmemory defines the bond that the 'generation after' has with the personal,

collective, and cultural traumas of the ancestors-experiences they 'remember' solely through the stories, pictures, and habits that they grew up with," however, these experiences are conveyed "so profoundly and affectively that they seem to be memories of their own, too" (Hirsch, *Generation* 5). Bela does not see the Naxalite movement or Udayan's killing, but the emotional leftovers of that past-secrecy, abandonment, and a fervent political drive-are what primarily shape her life.

Dominick LaCapra's distinction between **acting out** and **working through** further sharpens the analysis. LaCapra defines acting out as a tendency toward "repetition" in which the subject remains caught in the traumatic scene (LaCapra, "Acting-Out" 9). Working through, by contrast, is described as a "countervailing force" that does not erase trauma but enables a more critical, reflective relation to the past (LaCapra, "Acting-Out" 10). In *The Lowland*, Gauri largely exemplifies acting out through her withdrawal and abandonment, whereas Subhash approximates working through by attempting to build a caring family structure for Bela, even under the weight of concealed history. Together, Caruth, Hirsch, and LaCapra provide a vocabulary to name what Lahiri's narrative dramatizes: the belated, inherited, and repetitive nature of trauma across generations.

Intergenerational Trauma in Diaspora

Scholars of diaspora have increasingly recognized that migration narratives are not only about identity and assimilation but also about inherited trauma. Aditi Chakraverty notes that "intergenerational trauma, the transference of psychological distress from one generation to the next, is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the experiences of diasporic communities" (Chakraverty 323). Her research claims that diasporic literature provides "a valuable lens" to understand the changes that colonization, war, and displacement have made to "individuals and communities" (Chakraverty 324).

If one looks at the recent studies on South Asian histories, they will find similar proofs that the events such as the Partition of India have become the sources of cry of immigrant health and identity across different generations. For instance, Fizzah Sajjad Qureshi and co-authors, depict Partition as a "historical trauma" whose traumatic impact on the psyche has become the mainstay of the South Asian diaspora even after many years (Qureshi et al. 3). While this research focuses on health and social outcomes, it underscores how political rupture in the homeland persists within emigrant communities.

Within criticism on Lahiri, a 2025 article on *The Namesake* explicitly reads the novel through "intergenerational trauma" and shows how "past events keep reverberating in the lives of the characters and... are passed down to the next

generation" (Shah 2). The same logic of reverberation applies to *The Lowland*, where the Naxalite moment becomes an inherited emotional condition rather than a closed historical episode.

Thus, existing scholarship on diaspora and intergenerational trauma supports the claim that Lahiri's work can be read as a site where political and historical violence become embedded in family relations, identity formation, and psychological inheritance.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trauma Studies

Trauma theory provides the central conceptual grounding for this study. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is defined not by the event itself but by its recurrence in the psyche: "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located" (Caruth 8). According to Caruth, trauma becomes "a wound that cries out...a story that cannot be told" (4). This idea gives the reason why in *The Lowland*, Gauri does not tell about Udayan's death-her silence being the proof of trauma, not its disappearance. Besides, Dominick LaCapra comes with the idea that trauma incites two broad reactions: acting out which is a compulsive repetition of the past and working through which is a mediated and reflective engagement with it. He says, "Acting out is a repetition, whereas working through is a countervailing force" (LaCapra 144). Gauri through abandonment and emotional detachment, represents acting out, whereas Subhash, by trying to build up stability and take care of Bela, stands for working through.

Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory is an idea that tries to make sense of how Bela inherits trauma that she did not witness directly. According to Hirsch, postmemory is "the relationship that the 'generation after' has to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of the previous generation" (Hirsch 5). Bela's political activism, as a result, is like a mirror of Udayan's revolutionary zeal though she never saw him (Hirsch 5). Hirsch points out that the trauma which has been passed on to the next generation is not a metaphor: it is conveyed "so profoundly that it almost appears to be memories of their own" (Hirsch 5). Bela's emotional wandering, lack of faith in institutions, and indifference to stable structures are the most accurate examples of the unconscious heritage.

Postcolonial Diaspora Theory

Homi K. Bhabha's concept provides an explanation of the emotional aspect of diasporic trauma and migration. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha characterizes the diaspora

identity as "unhomely", the one, where the personal life is influenced by the dislocation of historical facts (Bhabha 13). He claims that the migrant subject lives "a world in which the home and the world become part of each other" (13). The way of thinking here makes it clear why America does not turn out to be the place of healing for Lahiri's characters: the emotional world of Bengal is still there in the Rhode Island household. Moreover, Bhabha suggests hybridity to be the aftermath of the colonial and migratory past, whereby the identities are not fully in one place or the other. The emotional lives of Gauri and Bela mirror this hybrid state not only from the cultural aspect but also from the psychological one as the family has a political past which cannot be mixed with their immigrant future.

Psychological Transmission Models

Intergenerational trauma theory distinguishes different intergenerational transmission of traumas postulates the following mechanisms:

Silence -The main communication of trauma inheritance is usually the silence that surrounds it rather than the actual stories. As Caruth points out, trauma very often reveals itself as "the gap between knowing and telling" (Caruth 3). Filmhood is full of mother-daughter glut characters. In such so much mumbling, speaking is structural and arguably Bela's transforming her mother's silence into her own words is the most potent scene in the novel.

Shame - LaCapra notes that trauma survivors can, through their own emotional shames and feelings of guilt, become transmitters of these phenomena to generally their descendants (LaCapra 79). Secret of Subhash to Bela regarding her origination of the parentage, initially, as a partial, she doesn't know it act, but later on, it turns into a guilt-driven attempt to protect her while at the same time it stabs her identity into the chest.

Emotional displacement - Psychologists explain the occurrence of unhealed traumas in the past manifesting as emotional retraction, detachment, or overprotection in parenting (Danieli 2). This accounts for the reason why Gauri rejects motherhood and Subhash becomes overly protective.

These theories combined demonstrate that *The Lowland* ought to be recognized not just as a migration narrative but as an emotional legacy that has been passed down through time and space as the consequence of the political history of the world.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study relies on qualitative textual analysis as its main source of research. Qualitative means of analysis open up the possibility of in-depth examination of language,

narrative, characters' psychology, and symbolism. In his book, "Literary Theory: An Introduction," Jonathan Culler states that literary analysis is figuring out "not only what the text says but how it produces meaning" (Culler 4). This method is very well suited for trauma studies as it is often the case that trauma is implied in the spaces, silences, and indirect narrative signals rather than being explicitly depicted. Hence, the novel is explored not only for storyline but also for emotional absences, narrative omissions, and character behaviour patterns.

The article employs persona and plot analysis to follow the dramatization of trauma in the family system. Shoshana Felman states that "the narrative itself becomes 'the witness of a crisis' when literature trauma" (Felman and Laub 5). To this end, the analysis concentrates on the ways in which Lahiri dramatizes Udayan's death, Gauri's withdrawal, and Bela's inherited restlessness for the embodiment of narrative trauma, applying this understanding.

The study adopts a **comparative theoretical framework**, combining:

- **Trauma Studies** (Caruth, LaCapra) to examine belatedness, acting out, and working through
- **Postmemory Theory** (Hirsch) to analyze inherited trauma in second-generation immigrants
- **Diaspora/Postcolonial Theory** (Bhabha) to interpret emotional dislocation, hybridity, and the unhomey psyche of migrants

This blended methodology allows the novel to be read simultaneously as a psychological document and a diasporic political text.

VI. POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND PERSONAL RUPTURE

Naxalism as a Catalyst: Udayan's Revolutionary Involvement

Udayan's participation in the Naxalite movement constitutes the originating trauma in *The Lowland*. Lahiri does not portray his involvement as accidental but as a direct response to a politically repressive climate. The novel mentions that Udayan thought revolution "was the only way to eradicate inequity" (*The Lowland* 21). His change to a radical reflects what Sumanta Banerjee describes as the main attraction of Naxalism "a conviction among youth that only armed uprising could bring social justice" (Banerjee 47). His departure shatters the home unit long before any violence is seen. The movement, even before his demise, changes the family dynamics, emotionally estranging the brothers and instilling fear in the household.

Udayan's hiding of the truth is the moment of breakage in the first place. He deceives his parents, secretly meets with comrades, and keeps guns in the ancestral land. Trauma theory considers secrecy as the necessary condition for later mental health issues. Cathy Caruth states that trauma starts as "an unassimilated event" which cannot be merged with stable meaning (Caruth 4). The actions of Udayan are the ones that generate such destabilization, thus, his family becomes the reluctant witnesses of the conflict that they cannot control.

The State's Repression: Surveillance, Execution, Public Spectacle

The Indian state hence turns into the main culprit of the trauma. Lahiri demonstrates the invasive presence of the police in the Mitra household, their surveillance over the family, and the final shooting of Udayan in front of Gauri. This, in turn, imitates the past. As Nandini Sundar, a historian, points out, during counterinsurgency operations, police "used public killing as a technique of political warning" quite regularly (Sundar 13). The state violence, according to Sundar, 'erased the boundary between public suppression and private terror' (14). Lahiri brings back this disintegration in her story. The home is depicted as the police shooting place now. The novel states: "They made him lie down... They shot him where he lay" (Lahiri 42). The physical part of the execution is only one side of it, the other one is symbolic punishment, which aims at depriving Udayan of his dignity and instilling fear in others. Dominick LaCapra claims that such instances are "the traumatic limit of experience" where one loses the power of understanding and only the feeling of shock is left (LaCapra 41). Gauri sees her husband's murder but is not given the opportunity to grieve. This involuntary witnessing is, perhaps, the psychological injury around which the novel unfolds.

The Birth of Trauma: Subhash and Gauri's Internal Fragmentation

The death of Udayan leads to two different ways of trauma development-Subhash's internalized sense of responsibility and Gauri's emotional numbness. Subhash is haunted by what LaCapra calls "empathetic unsettlement," a moral torment through which survivors empathize with the suffering of others (LaCapra 78). Gauri is not the reason for his love but to "save her from disgrace" (Lahiri 54) he weds her. His trauma becomes visible through the mode of caretaking, a gesture to fix what the past has broken. Gauri's trauma is embodied in the figure of an agitator, the obsessive return of the rupture of her emotions. According to LaCapra, "acting out is characterized by 'compulsive repetition instead of symbolization'" (LaCapra 21). Gauri is not able to tolerate the memory of Udayan; therefore, she rejects Subhash, keeps a distance from Bela, and finally

leaves the family. Her silence and detachment are not disappearance but the very signs of trauma. Marianne Hirsch's theory helps to understand this break: trauma causes "a profound break in transmission" thereby it changes the very nature of identity (Hirsch 6). In *The Lowland*, the death of Udayan is the point at which the family no longer shares the same emotional world. The break from here is the source of all the later trauma that is transmitted.

VII. TRAUMA TRANSMISSION MECHANISMS

Silence as Memory

In *The Lowland*, trauma emerges less through spoken testimony than through the charged absence of speech that structures family life. The execution of Udayan becomes the emotional centre of the household, yet it is rarely articulated. As Cathy Caruth argues, trauma is defined by "the gap between what is lived and what can be spoken," a rupture that prevents direct narration. Gauri's inability to speak about Udayan reflects this condition; to recall him is to relive the catastrophe of his death. His parents, too, participate in this silence. They never openly narrate the circumstances of Udayan's killing, instead preserving his presence through ritualised grief and emotional withdrawal. Their mourning is expressed not through conversation but through gestures-the preservation of his room, the avoidance of his name, and the insistence on carrying on as though "nothing had changed." When Subhash returns home, he observes that Udayan is "remembered in silence," and that the house feels marked by an absence that cannot be voiced.

Caruth further notes that trauma returns "not as a narrative memory but as a haunting presence." In Lahiri's narrative, this haunting presence takes the form of repression: the parents' quiet endurance, Gauri's withdrawal into intellectual abstraction, and the emotional distance that shapes Bela's upbringing. Even when Udayan's memory surfaces, it appears only indirectly-for instance, when Subhash realises that "he would always be in the house, in their lives," despite the refusal to speak about him. Such moments reveal how silence itself becomes a medium of remembrance.

This dynamic also aligns with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which arises not only from stories but from "imaginative investment and creation" in the absence of narrative transmission. Bela never learns the full truth about her biological father, yet she senses the emotional gravity surrounding his absence. She inherits gestures of loss without their explanation, growing up in an atmosphere shaped by unspoken grief. Udayan's parents' silence thus becomes part of a larger intergenerational pattern: the

unsaid is transmitted through mood, behaviour, and relational distance. In this way, Lahiri demonstrates that trauma does not require narration to persist. It survives in the quiet spaces of family life, where silence itself becomes memory without a story.

Guilt and Responsibility

It is the feeling of guilt and the sense of obligation which makes Subhash decide to bring up Bela as his own child. According to his view, "only he could protect her" (*The Lowland* 108). Nevertheless, this secrecy turns into something which is another trauma in itself. Dominick LaCapra points out that when a person is traumatized, they may feel "vicarious guilt" in which they take on the role of the one responsible for the event though they are not the perpetrators (LaCapra 70). Subhash seeks to fix the past but the weight of guilt separates him from the rest of people on an emotional level. Gauri's trauma is different from that of the others. She does not feel guilty but rather rejected and deserted. Her leaving Bela is an example of what LaCapra identifies as acting-out which is a compulsive and involuntary repetition of the original injury (LaCapra 21). She goes away because she is unable to live a life that is based on the death of Udayan. Her doing so, keeps the cycle of losing going on. Her choice is a clear illustration of how trauma can break down the bond between a mother and her child (LaCapra 22). Bela was the one who absorbed both-the protective Subhash's secrecy and the Gauri's abandonment, without knowing where they came from.

Exile and Migration as Trauma

Transition of the family to America doesn't remove the trauma. According to Homi Bhabha, the migrant subject lives in an "unhomely" environment where even the most private aspects of life are still haunted by the historical experience (Bhabha 13). Subhash is sure that Rhode Island will be a safe place but Udayan's death "followed them across the world" (*The Lowland* 122). According to trauma theory, the situation in which one has to leave their home frequently becomes a continuation of the trauma, rather than a resolution. Caruth points out that trauma "is experienced too soon to be known and too late to be forgotten" (Caruth 7). The political past is still there inside the immigrant domestic space. Therefore, exile is the traumatic echo of the past, not the fresh start.

Repetition and Displacement

The emotional patterns resulting from Udayan's death resound in the emotional life of the next generation again. Bela's difficulty in developing stable relationships becomes an emotional side effect of Gauri's withdrawal. In the book "Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory," Marianne Hirsch states that inherited trauma manifests itself as "repetition and displacement rather than

direct memory" (Hirsch 33). This is a repetition of the father's political resistance in Bela but she changes it to environmental activism-a silent handing down of her father's opposition. LaCapra says that trauma leads to "repetition compulsion" when the grief that has not been worked through "returns in various forms of self-disruption" (LaCapra 65). Bela's wandering way of life, distrust of institutions, and determination not to take root are all Gauri's emotional detachment aspects that have been replicated. This is the intergenerational echo: the family does not talk about the trauma that they have lived, but they live it over and over again-as silence, abandonment, anger, movement, and instability.

VIII. IMPACT ON IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

Fragmented Belonging

Trauma fundamentally shapes how Lahiri's characters relate to place and belonging. Subhash leaves India after Udayan's death, but the psychological wound follows him to the United States. Homi Bhabha describes this condition as "unhomeliness," in which the migrant subject lives in a space "where the borders between the home and the world become confused" (Bhabha 13). Subhash never fully belongs to Rhode Island because the emotional memory of the lowland remains embedded in him. Lahiri states that even years later he "thought of Udayan every day," indicating that migration does not produce emotional distance (*The Lowland* 135). According to Cathy Caruth, trauma resists temporal distance because it "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Subhash's American life thus becomes psychologically divided-physically present in one location, emotionally bound to another. His belonging is never complete; it is fragmented by loss.

Family as a Trauma Archive

The family becomes the site where political memory is stored, not through storytelling but through silence and emotional behaviour. According to Marianne Hirsch, such family inheritance is called "postmemory", where the descendants "remember" a past traumatic event not through their own experience but through emotional transmission (Hirsch 5). Bela grows up not knowing who her father is, but she decorates the emotional aftermath of his execution inside her: the secretiveness, the feeling of unsteadiness and the tendency to be rebellious. This is very much in line with Hirsch's explanation of postmemory as a memory that "is transmitted so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 5). Here the immigrant family becomes a trauma archive, politically speaking, it is there that the past is kept not through speaking but through psychological patterns. LaCapra's term for such phenomena, "repetition effects," is what is evident in Bela's

life, whereby "the past resurfaces in disguised form" because it has not been worked through (LaCapra 65). Her political engagement and denial of institutional affiliation are a mirror to Udayan's radicalism-without ever having met him.

Survival vs. Loss

The immigrant journey in *The Lowland* turns out to be a paradoxical negotiation of survival and loss. The violence Subhash's migration is able to prevent, brings about an emotional exile in him. Gauri manages to survive physically but loses her ability to share the intimacy. Bela manages to survive financially but is handed over the psychological scars she cannot identify. Jhumpa Lahiri's narrative confirms Aditi Chakraverty's statement that "diasporic lives may be physically distant from historical trauma but not psychologically exempt from its effects" (Chakraverty 323). Dominick LaCapra, a trauma theorist, explains that when trauma is not resolved, it leads to "a disabling aftermath" in which survival is always accompanied by loss that is still felt (LaCapra 41). The Mitra family is a case in point. They live, work, and bring up a child in America-but the emotional residue of political violence influences every part of their identity. Thus, the immigrant identity of the family is not solely the result of hope and opportunities but also the inheritance of the pain. The novel unpacks that diaspora is not the end of the history-it is a carrier of history to different emotional realms where it continues to influence personal life.

IX. CHARACTER CASE STUDIES

Udayan - The Origin of Trauma

Udayan is the case that shows the very beginning of political trauma in *The Lowland*. First his ideological commitment was full of hope, he believed revolution "was the only way to eradicate inequity" but it ended up with his own ruin (*The Lowland* 21). His passing becomes the familial psychic wound that the whole family story is built around. Cathy Caruth maintains that the main characteristic of trauma is "the endless impact of a history that will not stay in the past" (Caruth 4). Udayan's killing is his departure which haunts the family like an unresolved historical force. Even though he is not there in person, his absence is the presence that constantly reminds the characters of their trauma and thus influence the emotional world of each of them.

Gauri - Trauma Internalized

Gauri is the closest and most direct witness of Udayan's murder, and she is completely changed by the trauma - first, she becomes a widow who is deeply grieving and then, emotionally detached from her children. She is a typical example of what Dominick LaCapra refers to as the "acting-

out" whereby the subject remains "haunted or possessed by the past" and cannot move on (LaCapra 21). Instead of telling her story, Gauri chooses not to speak, Caruth argues that silence is very often the only language of trauma because traumatic events "resist integration into full consciousness" (Caruth 5). Her leaving of Bela is an instance of traumatic repetition by which she revives the breaking apart that she underwent and thus, she breaks her daughter apart. Academia becomes her safe haven-"a life of the mind detached from the personal world" (*The Lowland* 206). Her change is a confirmation of Hirsch's statement that trauma can lead to a "break in transmission," whereby the emotional bond is replaced by intellectual abstraction (Hirsch 6).

Subhash - Trauma Mediator

Subhash stands for the person who is the bridge between trauma and the chance of fixing things. After Udayan's death, he marries Gauri not out of love but from a sense of responsibility and compassion - a living example of what LaCapra calls "empathetic unsettlement", an ethical readiness to share someone else's pain (LaCapra 78). He tries to get over the trauma by making a loving home for Bela, which is a stark contrast to Gauri's behaviour. Hirsch states that working-through entails "critical distance without disavowal" (Hirsch 32). Subhash is the person who has this distance - he never negates the past, but at the same time, he doesn't allow it to ruin Bela's life. His love, thus, becomes one of the ways of historical repair, even though it is founded on concealment.

Bela - Postmemory

Bela is a perfect example of postmemory, which means that she inherited the trauma that she did not see. Postmemory is defined by Marianne Hirsch as a situation, in which the descendants "remember" the trauma through "stories, images, and behaviour" rather than through their own direct experience (Hirsch 5). Bela didn't learn the full story of her family until she was grown, nevertheless her actions-wandering lifestyle, antagonizing the authorities, engaging in political activism-were in harmony with Udayan's revolutionary fervour. She, in fact, is the "belated witness" that Caruth refers to- a person who is the carrier of the traumatic event's aftermath without having co-origin of the event (Caruth 8). Her existence is an example of LaCapra's "repetition effects" notion, wherein the traumatic experience is coming back, but changed and still emotionally recognizable (LaCapra 65). Bela's fight for the environment is a totally unaware and unintentional political struggle of Udayan, thus, she becomes the proof of trauma being transmitted not only by memory but also by ideology, emotional temperament, and life choices. She is the one who carries the inheritance without knowing it-thereby, she

confirms Hirsch's statement that postmemory is "as powerful as memory, but mediated through imagination and affect" (Hirsch 5).

X. TRAUMA WORKING-THROUGH VS. ACTING-OUT

The three central characters embody three different trauma responses, aligning closely with Dominick LaCapra's theoretical distinction.

Subhash -Working Through

Subhash is always trying to change his pain into something he can give to others. He brings up Bela with love, goes on with his life in a quiet manner, and is very much his own emotional self. In LaCapra's opinion, working through is a "critical distance without disavowal" (LaCapra 144). Subhash doesn't deflect the death of Udayan; however, he doesn't let it wreck the life of Bela. He is the moral center of the story.

Gauri - Acting Out

Gauri is stuck in a loop of repetition. She leaves her family behind, represses her sorrow, and isolates herself in some remote intellectual academic work. LaCapra considers acting-out as a situation where the person "relives the past as if it were fully present" (LaCapra 21). Trauma is the unprocessed force that dominates her existence. Her conduct, according to LaCapra, is a dramatization of the compulsive repetition, which is characteristic of the disorder, rather than a cure (LaCapra 22).

Bela - Unconscious Re-enactment

Bela memory of Udayan is not clear to her but she keeps repeating him. Her political activism, wandering lifestyle, and distrust of institutions are like her father's revolutionary way. Marianne Hirsch says that postmemory leads "repetitions, projections, and reenactments" in the descendants (Hirsch 5). Bela is the second wave of the trauma that she didn't witness, thus confirming Caruth's statement that trauma "returns to haunt those whose lives are connected to the event, even if indirectly" (Caruth 8).

Thus, Lahiri's characters illustrate a **triangular trauma system**:

- Subhash = repair
- Gauri = rupture
- Bela = repetition

Together, they reveal how trauma moves **forward through generations**, changing form but never disappearing.

XI. CONCLUSION

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* artfully conveys the idea that political trauma keeps haunting the generations that come after the ones directly affected. It is a psychological legacy, carried, among other things, via silence, emotional memory, and inherited patterns of behaviour. The killing of Udayan, a personal tragedy turned historical as it is set against the Naxalite movement, becomes the emotional fissure that runs through the lives of Gauri, Subhash, and Bela and structures them long after the event has passed. Caruth's trauma theory, according to which trauma is "not fully grasped as it occurs, and therefore returns later in repeated flashbacks" and this is "seen in Gauri's withdrawal and Bela's unconscious reenactment of her father's political rebellion," is reflected in the novel by Lahiri as well (Caruth 4).

The novel vividly depicts the transmission of trauma beyond the national borders that influences immigrant identity even when the individuals concerned do not have direct memory of the traumatic events. Postmemory theory proposed by Marianne Hirsch can be very helpful in understanding how Bela comes to be the one to "remember the experiences of which she was not the owner" that, however, continue to profoundly influence her emotional world (Hirsch 5). The writer illustrates the immigrant family as a place where political memory is stored subconsciously even if there is no political narrative shared by the members of the family.

The different responses of Subhash and Gauri to the events in the novel also serve as an argument for LaCapra's idea of the difference between working through and acting out. While Subhash is engaged in the process of therapy through carrying out actions of protection and caregiving, Gauri's character is that of the trauma victims who are imprisoned by the paralysis caused by the traumatic experience, this way she confirms LaCapra's warning that the trauma which has not been worked "may involve the repetition of destructive patterns instead of their transformation" (LaCapra 66).

At the core of *The Lowland*, there is a very private family grief that the author uses as a starting point to create a literary archive of political history. Through the events depicted in the novel, the author powerfully asserts the permanence of the trauma resulting from characters' involvement in a violent political movement - here the case is the Naxalite uprising - not in the only place where it is historically discussed but also in the emotional lives of those who are the descendants and have never witnessed it. Lahiri's story is an affirmation of the point that political history must be understood not only in terms of ideology and events but also in terms of its emotional afterlife which

is, in fact, very long, and where silence, guilt, abandonment, and yearning, among other things, constitute the enduring evidence of the violence having taken place.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. (1994). *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. University of Chicago Press.
- [2] Banerjee, Sumanta. (2008). *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*. Subarnarekha.
- [3] Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- [4] Caruth, Cathy. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [5] Chakrabarty, Dipesh. (1992). "The Death of History? Historical Consciousness and the Culture of Late Capitalism." *Public Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 47-65.
- [6] Chakraverty, Aditi. (2023). "Intergenerational Trauma Studies in Diasporic Writers: Unveiling the Literary Narratives of Inherited Wounds." *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 323-328.
- [7] Chakraverty, Aditi. (2023). "Intergenerational Trauma Studies in Diasporic Writers." *IJHSSM*.
- [8] Culler, Jonathan. (2011). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- [9] Danieli, Yael. (1998). "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma." *The International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, edited by Yael Danieli, Springer, pp. 1-17.
- [10] Desai, Jigna. (2004). "Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film." *Routledge*.
- [11] Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Routledge.
- [12] Halder, Anushua. (2020). "The Theme of Diaspora in the Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri." *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 135-142.
- [13] Hirsch, Marianne. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
- [14] Khan, Nighat. (2018). "Diasporic Consciousness in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 73-80.
- [15] LaCapra, Dominick. (2001). "'Acting-Out' and 'Working-Through' Trauma." *Yad Vashem Lectures*, Yad Vashem.
- [16] LaCapra, Dominick. (2001). *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [17] Lahiri, Jhumpa. (2013). *The Lowland*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- [18] Mondal, Nimai Chandra. (2023). "A Review of Studies on Jhumpa Lahiri." *Sree Chaitanya College Journal of Humanities*.
- [19] Qazi, Khursheed Ahmad. (2024). "Diasporic Identity and Cultural Displacement in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*.

- [20] Qureshi, Fizzah Sajjad, et al. (2023). "The Partition of India through the Lens of Historical Trauma: Intergenerational Effects on Immigrant Health in the South Asian Diaspora." *Ssm - Qualitative Research in Health*.
- [21] Sundar, Nandini. (2019). *The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar*. Verso.
- [22] Yehuda, Rachel, et al. (2015). "Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation." *Biological Psychiatry*, vol. 80, no. 5, pp. 372-380.